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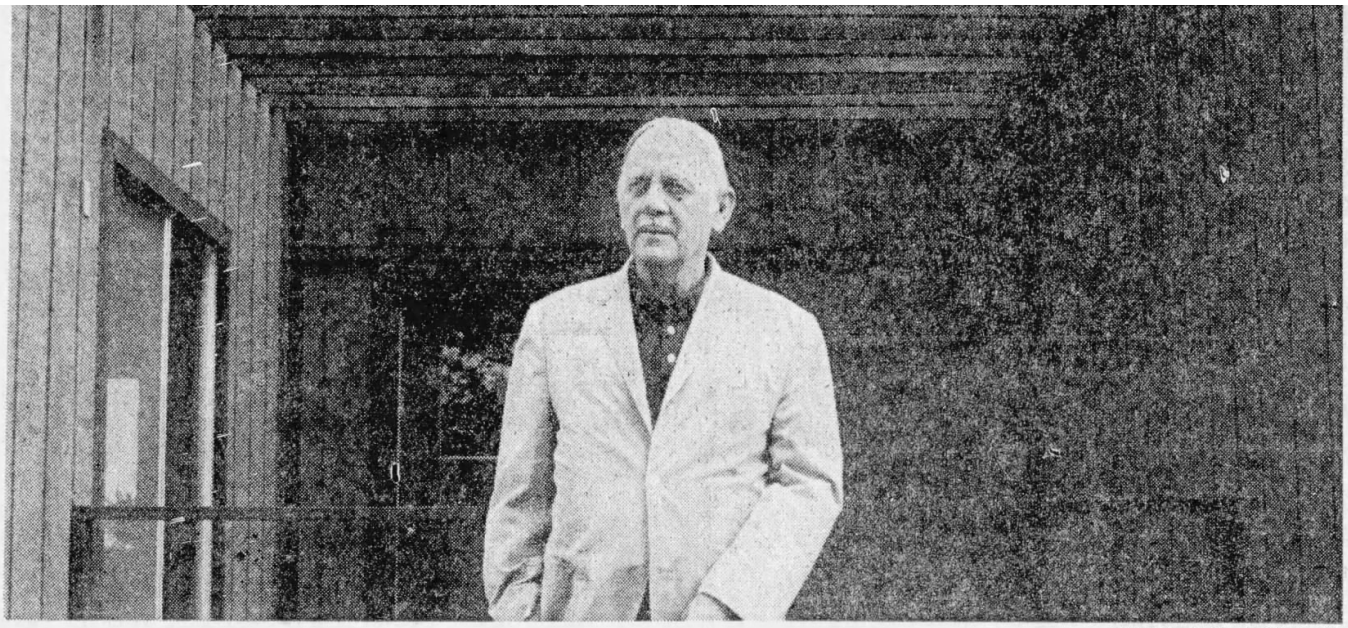


T-D Photos by Marsha Blakemore

Robert Allan Monroe: 'Researching a Death Experience Before Death . . .'

Group Explores 'Second Reality'

By Marsha Blakemore
Times-Dispatch State Staff

AFTON — A few months after the United States launched its first satellite into orbit in January 1958, a broadcasting executive in New York made another kind of journey into space.

One summer night, Robert Allan Monroe, 42, was in bed trying to sleep, when he suddenly realized that something was wrong.

As Monroe recalled, he was floating against the ceiling and bouncing gently. He rolled in the air, looked down and saw his wife and himself in bed.

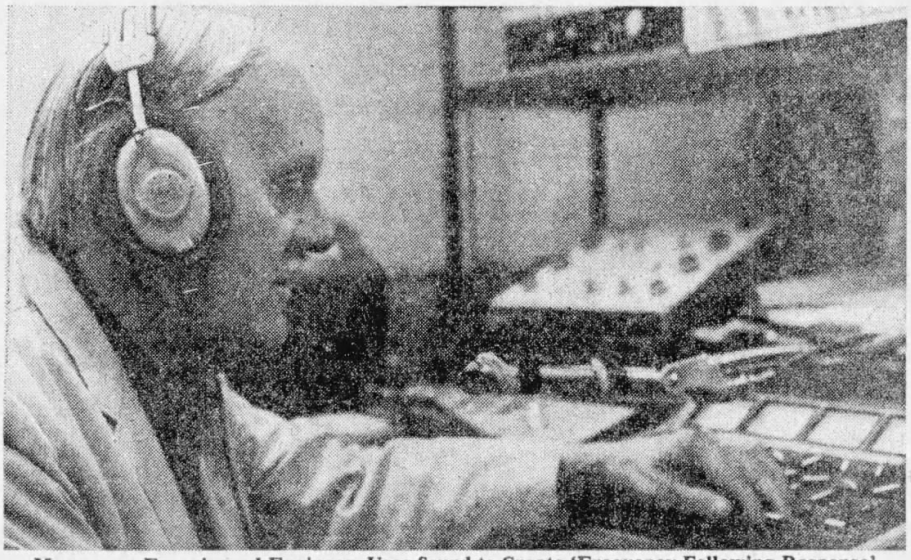
He thought he was dying, but he wanted to live.

"Desperately, like a diver, I swooped down into my body and dove in," he wrote in his book, "Journeys Out of the Body."

That first terrifying involuntary out-of-body experience was followed by hundreds of intentional journeys as Monroe began to use what he calls his second body to explore the "second-state" reality beyond the physical world he says he and others have visited.

Today, Monroe is executive director of Monroe Institute of Applied Sciences, which is on a farm near Skyline Drive.

There, he said he and a few followers are exploring these energy states in order to develop the techniques to control and use them.



Monroe, an Experienced Engineer, Uses Sound to Create 'Frequency Following Response'
'The Main Effect of the Synchronization Mode Is That It Lets Your Mind Be So Much More . . .'

THE INSTITUTE also sponsors workshops to enable others to use the techniques to expand their consciousness.

As the subject of out-of-body experiences has gained popularity in books and on television, Monroe's little-known research has started attracting attention.

About half a dozen crews have visited the institute to film documentaries during the last three years, he said, and his work has been reported nationally.

His book, which chronicles his early out-of-body travels and gives tips for others seeking such experiences, has been published in five languages since it appeared in 1971. A paperback edition issued in December is in its third printing, he said. He estimated that more than 100,000 copies have been sold.

"At the popular level, what we do relates very closely with the whole interest in death and dying," Monroe said.

Monroe, a pale, chunky man who chain-smokes

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Out-of-Body Group Director Takes Many 'Voyages'

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cigarettes, is patient. He answers slowly and carefully and seems to understand the skepticism that his ideas sometimes meet.

"We are dealing in an area where there's so much chaff and very little wheat anyway that we try very hard to hold to the things we are reasonably certain do exist as against wild speculation — and that sounds wild coming from us. ...

"We are researching a death experience before death. ... You can consciously explore the area you will inhabit after you leave this physical existence."

OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCES are events in which a person perceives an environment about which he could know nothing, considering the location of his physical body. People sometimes report that these experiences occur spontaneously when they are near death.

As in Monroe's early experience, a subject may feel himself floating above his body and be able to "see" himself on the operating table or in a wrecked car.

Some report flashing lights or the sensation of going through a tunnel.

Monroe says that anyone can explore the after life if he learns how to expand his consciousness. To aid in separating mind and body, Monroe, an engineer with much electronics experience, developed a series of tape recordings.

These use sound patterns that create a "frequency following response" in the brain.

Subjects wear stereo headphones, and the brain mixes the tones that are sent into the ears. The FFR procedure, which produces deep relaxation and is used to induce sleep, was granted a generic patent in 1975.

The FFR technique promotes synchronization of waves between the left and right hemispheres of the brain, Monroe said. This synchronization, which is measurable by an electroencephalograph, is what also happens to a Zen master who has meditated for years, he said.

"THE MAIN EFFECT of the synchronization mode is that it lets your mind be so much more than it is ordinarily," he said.

Synchronization enhances creativity, decision making and problem solving because it gives a person a new perspective he said. After only about 15 minutes of synchronization, a person feels elated.

Travel into other energy systems is not without problems, however, Monroe said.

Some people are frightened of exploring other realities, and the guides are careful to support them and to let them know they can return at any time, he said.

When Monroe first started traveling out of his body, it was "totally unacceptable culturally," and for six months he feared that he had a brain tumor or something worse. Extensive psychological and physical examinations showed him to be healthy.

Now, out-of-body experiences are common in his life.

"I think of it as a learning mode rather than as an exploration. What I learn, I apply to myself."

Monroe no longer annotates each trip and he finds that he wakes in the night and "at 3 in the morning, after two sleep cycles, I'm totally relaxed. It's very easy for me to detach and roll out of the physical."

A SELF-DESCRIBED MAN of many talents, Monroe, 62, is from Lexington, Ky. He earned a bachelor's degree in engineering from Ohio State University and spent about 25 years in broadcasting.

He has written, produced or directed 400 radio and TV programs and composed the music for them. A former vice president and director of Mutual Broadcasting System Inc., Monroe also owned radion stations in North Carolina.

In 1961, he moved to Richmond where he owned radio station WRGM. He sold the station to obtain the franchise for cable TV stations in Charlottesville and Waynesboro. He moved to the Charlottesville area in 1964.

Monroe operated the cable TV stations until two years ago, when he began to devote his full energy to his research and programs.

More than 1,400 people, about 40 percent of them psychologists, psychiatrists or students in those fields, have attended his weekend programs, which are designed to teach novices the techniques to expand their consciousness and to use the information in daily life.

THE WEEKEND sessions, which cost $195, are scheduled for Richmond, California and New England. They start on Thursday night and end at noon Sunday. About 20 participants listen to 45-minute tapes through headphones six times daily while lying on mattresses in a large, dark room.

During the sessions, participants are guided to various consciousness levels, which Monroe's program calls Focus 10, 12 and 15.

In Focus 10, which is described as a lucid dream state, the body is asleep and the mind is awake. Through oral suggestion from Monroe, the subjects advance to Focus 12, an "expanded, high-energy state," where one can ask wide-ranging questions and an inner voice will answer. Some participants have control over out-of-body experiences.

Focus 15 is a timeless state.

Members of the institute's eight-member "explorer" team have ventured to Focus 18, Monroe said, but he refused to describe it.

Although tapes are used initially, the idea is that a person will learn to reach focus states on his own. Participants also learn how to do "distant viewing," perceiving people and places elsewhere.

Although the techniques are explained in the sessions, most people need to practice them at home before they get the desired results, according to Nancy Lea Honeycutt, Monroe's stepdaughter and a leader in most programs.

THE INSTITUTE is moving to 10-day sessions that would cost $585 to $1,000, depending on the location, because the longer period offers a more leisurely approach, Monroe said.

He also has developed a surgical program available to graduates that uses tape recordings for the preoperative, operating room, recovery room and recuperative settings.

Ideally, listening to the tapes would reduce the amount of anesthesia needed, he said.

Although neither he nor any of his staff is a psychologist or psychiatrist, Monroe said many professionals elsewhere are using his tapes experminentally.

One psychologist who attended a weekend session and has listened to tapes at the institute said that while he never had any paranormal or out-of-body experience there, he did feel deep relaxation and harmony.

"I enjoyed myself very much. But I wouldn't want to say that his techniques work or don't work. I don't want to endorse his activities," the psychologist said.

"I would like to see him publish the results of his work in academic journals," he said.

Much of the institute's research takes place in three isolation rooms, which have been rendered electrically neutral. On heated waterbeds, explorers put themselves into advanced focus levels without the use of tapes, then report their experiences into microphones

"And the most fascinating part is the amazingly similar reports. When a new explorer joins us, he tells us all these exciting things he encounters, but it's old hat to us," Monroe said.